

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

S E C R E T AMMAN 10018

LIMDIS

E.O. 1152: GDS

TAGS: PINT, JO

SUBJECT: TALK WITH PRIME MINISTER RIFAI -- JORDANIAN ELECTIONS

1. IN A DISCUSSION WITH RIFAI DECEMBER 29 HE TOUCHED BRIEFLY ON THE NECESSARY STEPS IN THE PROCESS OF SETTLING JORDAN'S ELECTIONS ISSUE.

2. RIFAI SAID THAT THERE WILL BE NO PRIOR ANNOUNCEMENT OF JORDANIAN INTENTIONS REGARDING ELECTIONS. SINCE JORDAN HAS RESOLVED ON NOT HOLDING ELECTIONS, GOJ FAILURE TO MAKE REQUIRED ANNOUNCEMENT FORTY-FIVE DAYS PRIOR TO THE LAST DATE ON WHICH ELECTIONS CAN BE HELD (WE MARCH 1976) WILL BE A SIGNAL TO ALL THAT THERE WILL BE NO ELECTIONS.

3. UNDER CONSTITUTION PRESENTLY DISSOLVED PARLIAMENT WOULD AUTOMATICALLY THEN MEET ON 23 MARCH. WHILE IT IS SLIGHTLY IRREGULAR, RIFAI SAID THE PLAN NOW IS TO CALL THE PARLIAMENT BACK ON FEBRUARY 23. UNDER THIS PROCEDURE PARLIAMENTARY ACTIVITY CAN BE LIMITED TO DISCUSSION OF

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A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT WHICH WOULD ALLOW THE KING

AND CABINET IN "EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES" TO POSTPONE ELECTIONS INDEFINITELY RATHER THAN AS CURRENTLY PRESCRIBED FOR ONE YEAR. THEY COULD ALSO AVIOD KING'S ATTENDANCE AT PARLIAMENT AND A SPEECH FROM THE THRONE.

4. SPEAKING CONFIDENTIALLY, RIFAI SAID THEY WOULD HAVE PARLIAMENT MEET INFORMALLY WITH THE KING PRIOR TO RECONVENING FEBRUARY 23 AND EVEN SEEK ALL OF THE PARLIAMENTARIAN'S SIGNATURES ON THE PROPOSED AMENDMENT. WEST BANK PARLIAMENTARIANS FULLY SUPPORTED THE POSTPONEMENT PROCEDURE SINCE OTHERWISE THEY WOULD LOSE THEIR SEATS AND SALARIES. A NUMBER OF THE EAST BANKERS SUPPORT THE AMENDMENT ALSO. SOME OF THE LOWER HOUSE MEMBERS HAVE SINCE BEEN APPINTED SENATORS AND IF PARLIAMENT IS RECALLED THEY WILL HAVE TO GO BACK TO THE LOWER HOUSE. IN RETURN FOR SUPPORTING THE AMENDMENT, RIFAI HAS PROMISED THEM REAPPOINTMENT TO THE SENATE WITH BETTER SALARIES AND HIGHER PRESTIGE AFTER PARLIAMENT RECONVENES.

4. COMMENT: RIFAI APPEARS CONFIDENT HE HAS SITUATION "WELL IN HAND." WHILE IT APPEARS SO, IT IS NOT IMPOSSIBLE THAT SOME OR A NUMBER OF OUTSPOKEN PARLIAMENTARIANS MAY CAUSE TROUBLE, INCLUDING AN EFFORT TO SET SOME TIME LIMIT ON THE PERIOD IN WHICH THE KING CAN UNILATERALLY POSTPONE ELECTIONS. THE LAST PARLIAMENT, WHEN FACED WITH THE SAME PROBLEM, REDUCED THE TIME FROM TWO YEARS TO ONE YEAR FOR WHICH KING COULD POSTPONE ELECTIONS. END COMMENT. PICKERING

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